21 SHUTTER BUTTON
22 DIGITAL SIGNAL PROCESSOR
24 MEMORY CARD
24A SOLID STATE IMAGE MEMORY
24B EXTERNALLY GENERATED DATA FILES   5
26 SIGNAL PORT
28 ALGORITHM MEMORY
29 USER CONTROL SWITCHES
30 STATUS DISPLAY PANEL
31 MEMORY SECTION   10
32*a* FIRMWARE MEMORY
32*b* INSTRUCTION MEMORY
34 INTERFACE
35 NON-VOLATILE IMAGE MEMORY
36 ELECTRICALLY ERASABLE FIRMWARE MEMORY 15
38 INTERFACE CABLE
50 PANEL CONFIGURATION
52*a* "TAG" ICON
52*b* ALPHANUMERIC SECTION
52*c* BATTERY ICON   20
52*d* FLASH MODE ICON
52*e* SELF TIMER ICON
52*f* IMAGE DELETE ICON
54 TOGGLE SWITCH
56 SELECTOR SWITCH   25
60–66 STEPS

What is claimed is:

1.   An electronic camera for capturing images representing a variety of subjects, said camera comprising;

an image sensor for capturing the images;

a converter stage for converting the images into digital image data;

a memory for storing a plurality of categories providing classification of the images by subject;

a processor having the capability of assigning the plurality of categories to the images captured by the image sensor, each category providing subject classification of one or more images;

[a user] control means for selecting one or more categories for the images [before the images are captured by the image sensor]; and

means for generating an output image signal comprising an image file including both the digital image data corresponding to the images and separate category data including the one or more categories selected by the user control, wherein the category data is separately accessible for each image apart from the image data.

2. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 1 wherein the memory is firmware and the categories are default categories stored in the firmware.

3. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 2 wherein the user control includes a status display for showing the default categories and the user control selects a particular one of the default categories from those displayed on the status display.

4. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 3 wherein the user controls includes a first control interface for cycling through the default categories one-by-one and displaying each category individually, and a second control interface for selecting a displayed category.

5. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 1 wherein the one or more categories included in the output image data is associated with the digital image data in a distinct file location.

6. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 1 wherein the one or more categories included in the output image data is overlaid into the image data.

7. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 1 wherein the camera further comprises a signal port for receiving externally generated categories, and wherein the processor also stores the externally generated categories in the memory and the user control is further capable of selecting a particular one of the externally generated categories.

8. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 7 wherein the externally generated categories are alphanumeric names.

9. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 7 wherein the signal port also receives externally generated text strings for one or more of the categories, and wherein the processor also stores the text strings in the memory with the one or more categories.

10. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 7 wherein the signal port also receives externally generated graphics images for one or more of the categories, and wherein the processor also stores the graphics images in the memory with the one or more categories.

11. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 9 wherein the means for generating an output image signal overlays the text strings into the digital image data.

12. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 10 wherein the means for generating an output image signal overlays the graphics images into the digital image data.

13. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 1 wherein the memory stores a plurality of default categories providing a default classification of the image by a set of codes, and wherein the camera further comprises a signal port for receiving externally generated categories, the processor stores the externally generated categories in the memory, and the user control preferentially accesses the externally generated categories when they are stored in the memory.

14. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 13 wherein the processor includes date and time information with the externally generated categories.

15. An electronic imaging system using an electronic camera as claimed in claim 7 in combination with a host processor, wherein the host processor provides the externally generated categories to the signal port.

16. An electronic imaging system as claimed in claim 15 wherein the output image signal is output to the host processor through the signal port and the host processor includes an application program which identifies images from the categories associated with the digital image data in the output image signal and downloads only the digital image data from one or more selected categories.

17. An electronic camera for capturing images representing a variety of subjects, said camera comprising:

an image sensor for capturing a particular image;

a converter stage for converting the particular image into digital image data;

a signal port for receiving at least one externally generated category providing classification of the image by subject;

a memory for storing each category provided by the signal port;

a processor having the capability of assigning said at least one category stored in the memory to the images captured by the camera, each category providing subject classification of one or more images;

[a user] control means for selecting a particular category for the selected image; and

´ means for generating an output image signal comprising an image file including both the digital image data corresponding to the particular image and separate category data including the particular category selected by the user control, wherein the category data is separately accessible for each image apart from the image data.

18. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 17 wherein the externally generated category is an alphanumeric name.

19. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 17 wherein the signal port also receives externally a generated text string for the particular category, and wherein the processor also stores the text string in the memory with the particular category.

20. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 17 wherein the signal port also receives an externally generated graphics image for the particular category, and wherein the processor also stores the graphics image in the memory with the particular category.

21. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 19 wherein the means for generating an output image signal overlays the text string into the digital image data.

22. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 20 wherein the means for generating an output image signal overlays the graphics image into the digital image data.

23. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 17 wherein the memory also stores a plurality of default categories providing a default classification of the image, and wherein the user control preferentially accesses the default categories when the signal port does not receive any externally generated categories.

24. An electronic imaging system using an electronic camera as claimed in claim 17 in combination with a host processor, wherein the host processor provides each externally generated category to the signal port.

25. An electronic imaging system as claimed in claim 24 wherein the output image signal is output to the host processor through the signal port and the host processor includes an application program which identifies images from the particular category associated with the digital image data in the output image signal and downloads only the digital image data from the particular category.

26. An electronic camera as claimed in claim 7 wherein the signal port connects to a removable memory card.

27. An electronic imaging system as claimed in claim 15 wherein the signal port connects to a removable memory card, and the host processor provides the externally generated categories to the signal port by writing the categories into the memory card.

28. An electronic imaging system as claimed in claim 15 wherein a cable connection is provided between the signal port and the host processor, and the host processor provides the externally generated categories over the cable connection to the signal port.

29. An electronic camera for capturing images representing a variety of subjects, said camera comprising;

an image sensor for capturing the images;

a converter stage for converting the images into digital image data;

a memory for storing a plurality of categories providing classification of the images by subject;

a processor having the capability of assigning the plurality of categories to the images captured by the image sensor, each category providing subject classification of one or more images;

[a user] control means for selecting one or more categories for the images [before the images are captured by the image sensor];

means for storing the digital image data in image files; and

means for grouping the image files according to the plurality of categories.

30. A method using an electronic camera for capturing images representing a variety of subjects, said method comprising the steps of:

storing a plurality of categories providing classification of the images by subject.
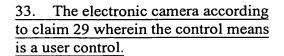
assigning at least one of the plurality of categories to the images [before the images are captured by the electronic camera], each category providing subject classification of one or more images

capturing the images with the electronic camera;

converting the images into digital image data; and

generating an output image signal comprising [in] an image file including both the digital image data corresponding to the images and separate category data including the one or more categories selected by [the user] a control, wherein the category data is separately accessible for each image apart from the image data.

31. The electronic camera according to claim 1 wherein the control means is a user control.

32. The electronic camera according to claim 17 wherein the control means is a user control.

33. The electronic camera according to claim 29 wherein the control means is a user control.

34. The method according to claim 30 wherein the control is a user ~~control.~~

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